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## A COUNTING-HOUSE ROMANCE.

IN NINE CHAPTERS.—CHAPTER I.

At nine o'clock, one cheerless February morning, the clerks of Perrow and Son assembled in their respective offices, as was their habit and duty; old Mr Lambell, the second in command, being to his time, as for fifty-seven years he always had been, holidays only excepted. He had entered the house even before it bore its present names, when it consisted of old Isaac Perrow and young Isaac Perrow; and now old Isaac Perrow was dead and forgotten, his son was an old man, and it was Isaac and Ambrose Perrow who kept up the style of the firm. Mr Lambell was not chief-clerk—there were seventeen clerks in all: in spite of his long service, he had never attained that distinction. Half-a-dozen times it had seemed to fall to him by right; but his chiefs, who were as good judges of servants, and as well able to get the utmost out of them, as any firm in the City of London, had always hesitated to put him in supreme power. There was a quiet, easy-going affability about the old clerk, which argued against his possession of certain 'driving' qualities, which, when numbers of men are to be ruled, are held to be of more value even than talent, experience, or fastidious integrity; so he never reached the apex. But in no instance was he passed over without a handsome present, in addition to his salary; and he was known to possess the confidence of his masters beyond any other clerk in the establishment.

The old clerk made his usual bow to the young men who were already at their desks, and laid his old bachelor-looking umbrella on his own table, while he took off his hat, and folded his gloves one into the other, according to invariable custom; but one or two of his subordinates had looked half inquiringly round at the more than usually tremulous tone in which he spoke, and now all turned as he uttered a feeble ejaculation, and placed one hand on his forehead, while he supported himself by leaning the other upon the table. 'What is

the matter, Mr Lambell? Are you unwell?' said the clerk nearest to him. The old gentleman tried to speak, but only got out some inarticulate sounds, and staggering at the same time, would have fallen, but that the young man caught him. The office was at once in confusion; and while two or three men helped the now insensible clerk into Mr Perrow's private room, others ran in search of the nearest surgeons. Two of the latter were soon upon the spot, entering the office at the same time as the senior partner, who expressed great sorrow on hearing what had occurred; and shewed more emotion than any of his clerks would have believed him capable of feeling, when he saw his old servant lifted into a cab, and driven off accompanied by one of the doctors. He never saw him alive again. It was paralysis, and a lighter shock than he had received would probably have sufficed to close such a feeble life. At anyrate, Mr Lambell died the next day; and as he had left his surviving children very well provided for, the firm could only put a notice of his death—with a line of praise for his long and faithful service—in the papers, and place a handsome stone over his grave. This they did; another man, at a much lower salary, was appointed to his situation, and the tide of life closed over his memory; yet the firm felt that it would be long ere they found a man to suit them like Mr Lambell. 'We shall be a long time before we get a man to suit us like poor old Lambell; a—long—time. I don't know, indeed,' continued the senior partner, who was speaking to his son alone, 'where to lay my hands upon any one at all like him.'

Ambrose Perrow was fully six feet high, with perhaps an inch to spare, and wore the huge beard, moustache, and whiskers which, about the time of the Crimean War and the days of the first gold-diggers, began to grow common. He looked, indeed, not unlike a heavy-cavalry officer, for a certain air marked his clothes, and gave a swagger to his movements, which is common to soldiers; yet he had never been in the army. But he had been abroad a great deal, and that in countries where, at that time, at anyrate, few went for pleasure, and almost as few for profit. The

result of his travels had been to darken his complexion very much, and to give him, as just said, a somewhat reckless, military air, utterly unlike his father, or his father, as the clerk lately dead was wont to say. For all that, he was a very good man of business, and the interests of Perrow and Son were not likely to suffer in his hands, either now, or in time to come—as those who had at first held him in some contempt, on account of his heresies in dress and manner, were at last obliged to own. When the day came that he should be 'Perrow,' there was every reason to believe the firm would still be Perrow and Son, for although his only child was but eighteen months old, nevertheless it was a boy; and Isaac Perrow, although numbering sixty-five years, seemed likely enough to live to eighty-seven, as did his father before him. The son was about forty, and had only been married between two and three years; rumour had it that Mr Perrow was very glad when he did marry, as he had terrible anxiety and trouble with him; but this idea was perhaps based on the conjectures of the clerks. It was at least certain that he was married now; that his wife was well connected and very rich; beautiful, too, and very proud of her beauty, her rank, and her riches. Dependants, when they are clerks, are generally ready to admire their master's wife, even if they don't admire their master; but the few clerks who, on rare occasions, had seen Mrs Perrow, were so struck by her haughty, not to say contemptuous air, that they had little to say in her praise.

'I understand what the difficulty is,' said the younger man, replying to his father's remark; 'of course, I see that, and it is a difficulty. Although we never trusted poor old Lambell with much, yet we knew he might have been trusted if occasion arose, and, what was more, if he had got hold of half a secret, would never have ferreted about to hunt out the other half.'

'That is exactly the case,' assented the elder. 'We shall soon want some one, too, for the half-year is nearly up.'

'Give such commissions to your lawyer; that is my advice,' said Mr Ambrose. 'They are in his line, and it is his trade to be secret.'

'I am not so sure of that,' said Mr Perrow, half in answer, and half musingly—'I am not so sure of that. Lawyers may keep secrets—I am not saying they don't—but they certainly like to find them out. It is like playing with edged tools to have anything to do with a lawyer. No; I think we must manage as before. As we have no intention of confiding anything to the man we may select, it ought not to be very difficult'—he paused here, but resumed—'it ought not to be very difficult to choose him, but it is so. At anyrate, we must wait a bit, and I think I have an idea'—Here a tap at the door ushered in an agent upon some business; to him followed others, and so the day wore on.

It was a busy time in Perrow and Son's just then; the pressure was so great, that several of the clerks had to stay behind, every night, to complete or check the invoices of goods going or coming. When Mr Powle, the new second clerk, was locking his desk that evening, the gong from his chief's room sounded, and then the youngest clerk told him that Mr Perrow wished to see him. Devoutly hoping that there was nothing to detain

him, as a friend had sent him and Mrs Powle tickets for the theatre, he hurried in, and found the old gentleman sitting alone.

'I only want to ask you who are on late to-night, Mr Powle,' said his chief.

'Oh! Why, Blake, sir, with Wingett and Parsey,' was the reply.

'Hum!' muttered the superior. 'And who to-morrow, Mr Powle?'

'Vann, sir, with Brown and Doliman.'

'Ah—hum,' muttered Mr Perrow again. 'Well, that will do, Mr Powle, that will do. Good-night, Mr Powle.'

The second clerk hurried out, thanking his stars that no such *contre-temps* as he dreaded had befallen him, and that the ticket could be used.

On the next morning, each partner arrived with his usual exactness, and, immediately after the customary greeting, the father said in a low tone: 'I know the man to suit.' Although no syllable had been exchanged in continuation of the previous morning's discourse, Mr Ambrose answered as if they had but just ceased speaking.

'One of our own fellows?' said he.

'Yes; I mean Vann,' returned his father. 'I have had my eye on him for a long time.'

The younger man considered for a moment, then gave an assenting nod, and plunged into his papers, as though the matter in which Mr Vann was concerned had entirely passed from his mind. But more than once that morning he paused for periods of unusual duration, and thoughtfully gazed through the dingy window-panes, or scrawled meaningless lines with his pencil on his blotting-pad. He said nothing, however, nor did his father renew the subject.

As was his custom, Perrow senior remained that night at the office after his son had left; but when the clerks found he did not leave at his usual time, they became very anxious, and Mr Powle made some excuse for entering the private office, and, when there, asked if he could render any assistance. The old gentleman thanked him, but replied in the negative: he was not remaining there on business exactly, he said, but he had an appointment to keep at no great distance, and it was more comfortable to wait in his own room than elsewhere.

'By-the-bye, Mr Powle,' exclaimed Mr Perrow, as his clerk was leaving, 'I think you may as well send the men home to-night; I fancy the work is not quite so pressing.'

'Certainly, sir, certainly; only'—There was a hesitation about Powle's assent which attracted his master's notice.

'What is it, Powle?' he asked.

'Only that we usually let a man stop every night about this time, to open the last letters, sir, and sort them for the morning.'

'True,' returned the merchant, seeming to reflect—'true. Whose turn is it to-night?'

'Oh, Vann's, sir, of course,' said the clerk; 'the clerk in charge always takes the letters.'

'Very well,' said Mr Perrow carelessly. 'Then, let Vann stay; the others can go.'

With a bow, the clerk withdrew, and no doubt communicated the glad tidings promptly, for, in a couple of minutes, the last man had passed through the doors, and no one but the solitary clerk in charge was left in the offices, although, in the distant perspective of the warehouses, a few

men could still be seen at work. In his glass case, Mr Vann sat and worked as quietly and steadily as though it were high noon, and he was under the immediate eye of his chiefs. Vann always did this; nevertheless—or perhaps we should say ‘therefore’—he was not a great favourite with his comrades. He had been there by himself about an hour, when he looked up from his work, and saw his master walking past the office. Mr Perrow had some papers in his hand, and, after glancing inquiringly round, he beckoned to the clerk.

‘I want you to check a few figures for me, Mr Vann,’ said the merchant. ‘Will you come into my office, if you please?’

The clerk, who had never before been so distinguished, followed briskly, and congratulated himself on his good fortune in being left there alone at such a juncture. They entered the private office; and the chief, indicating what was required, sat down to wait while his clerk silently completed the task. Mr Perrow watched his servant during the interval; not curious in reference to the operation, but with a wrinkled brow, which shewed that he was weighing and judging some serious matter in his mind. He was a man a little, but not much, below the middle height, with a frame still firmly knitted, and his head, on which the white hair was still thick, as erect as it had ever been. There was a quick, keen glance behind the gold spectacles, and a firmness about the clean-shaven, broad jaw—although the skin was wrinkled by time—which spoke of a resolute, decided character. And of such he was; his closed thin lips told as much without speaking, and when they did speak, his tones were decided and resolute too. Vann gave the papers to his superior in a very few minutes.

‘They are right, are they?’ said Mr Perrow.

The clerk bowed, and dropped his eyes respectfully. He had a way of doing this, and, during the five years he had been in his situation, had seldom looked any one in the face, or spoken above his breath; indeed, excepting on business, had rarely been heard to speak at all. Yet he had not a slinking look; he was rather of a reserved and sullen aspect. He was not a man who made many friends; he had none apparently; for he was unpopular with his comrades, and had come from a distant part of England on the recommendation of a provincial firm; was remarkably accurate in his work, but not very quick; and was noted for his solitary and retiring habits. All this Mr Perrow thought over as he watched the clerk’s drooping eyes and his sallow, lean cheeks. At last his mind seemed made up, and he spoke as clearly as was his wont.

‘You have been nearly five years in our service, Mr Vann. I have made some inquiries about you at various times, and am pleased to say the result has always been satisfactory. As a natural result, I have determined upon promoting you.’

The clerk bowed.

‘I cannot, however, without creating a fresh situation, or causing some jealousy in the other clerks, do this in the ordinary manner. I have therefore decided upon employing you to a certain extent as my private clerk, as I did poor Mr Lambell, paying you, as I did him, by an extra bonus every year. Your regular advances you will receive in due course with the rest of the staff. Will that suit you?’

‘I shall only be too happy to undertake the duties,’ said the clerk.

‘Very well, Vann,’ continued Mr Perrow. ‘They are very light—indeed, I may say trivial; but yet, being for me personally, they must be done to time, and by a person in whom I can place implicit confidence. Now, are you that person?’

‘I am, sir,’ briefly replied the man.

‘There is nothing very particular in the business I shall intrust to you; but it is important, indispensable that you never speak of it excepting to myself. You quite understand?’

The clerk bowed silently again.

‘That will do, then. I will let you know when I want you,’ continued the merchant. ‘Put these papers away, and lock up after me. Good-night.’ And the old gentleman left.

Vann quietly and methodically cleared the room, cleared the door, waited for the letters, selected those which were from known business correspondents, and opened them, locked the office, and gave the key to the night-foreman of the warehouse, without a muscle of his face shewing pleasure or exultation at the distinction just conferred on him, although it was by far the most important advance he had made in his career. So Mr Perrow, who was famed for such skill, had once more proved himself a good judge of character.

## CHAPTER II.

The chosen clerk was intrusted with several commissions, very slight in themselves; but as they were all of an exclusively personal nature, and concerned only the private affairs of the partners, he did not wonder that a special and confidential man should be selected to execute them. Concerning one which was given him about a fortnight after his appointment, Mr Perrow, senior, was a little more diffuse in his directions, as it appeared to his clerk, than he need have been; more explanatory, at any rate.

‘You will go to this address,’ said the old gentleman (they were alone, as they always were when any of these confidential instructions were given. The address indicated was a street in Greenwich), ‘and you will ask for Mrs White. On seeing her, you will give her this cheque for thirty pounds, and take a receipt in favour of Macbennoe, Donaldson, and Company of Liverpool. It is a country cheque, as you see, but the woman will have no difficulty in changing it; she has had many before. In fact, the case stands thus,’ continued Mr Perrow, lowering his voice still more, and giving a very needless explanation to his obedient satellite: ‘This firm—a very respectable firm, a first-class firm, Mr Vann, as you must know’—

‘Certainly I do, sir,’ assented Vann, finding that his superior paused.

‘Well,’ resumed Perrow senior, ‘they are acting in this matter for a client of theirs, whose interest it is to keep this good lady quiet, and at a distance from Liverpool. There are wheels, you know, within wheels, Mr Vann, and never more certainly than when a lady is in the case. So, half-yearly, you will take this Mrs White thirty pounds, and I prefer paying it with the identical cheque sent, because, when you have principals, and suspicious Scotchmen too, Mr Vann, you cannot be too cautious. Therefore, be very careful not to gossip with her, or to be led into any discussion whatever. A very

little might give offence to Macbennoe and Company, for which I should be extremely sorry. You pay the cheque, and you know nothing.'

At the close of this speech, much the longest Vann had ever known his superior utter, and which was interspersed with tokens of jocularity quite foreign to his usual delivery, Mr Perrow sat down and took up his newspaper, as a sign that the interview was over.

Vann left on his mission; and having other business to transact during the day, did not return to the office until past the hour at which Mr Perrow commonly left, and so he did not expect to see him; but on this particular evening, the old gentleman, either from accident or design, was staying later than usual, and had left word that the clerk was to see him in his private room immediately upon his return. Vann, of course, obeyed, and presented himself to his superior.

'Oh, Mr Vann—to be sure,' said Mr Perrow, as though he had been in some doubt as to the cause of his clerk's appearance. 'Well, have you the receipt? Thank you. Received this—um—day—um—um—Macbennoe—um—thirty pounds—um—um—um—Jane White. Quite correct. And what did she say, Mr Vann? Rather talkative, probably?'

'I did not see her,' returned the clerk; 'she was unwell, and was lying down. The girl who was in attendance took in a note, and then came out and said her mistress would sign the receipt if I sent it in. Finding everything as you described, and as you had sent the money for a long time, I thought I could not do wrong in this.'

'Quite right,' said the merchant—'quite right. Do you suppose the illness is very serious? Is—is it dangerous?' A quicker observer than Vann might have fancied that the sudden lighting of the old man's eyes betokened a hope, rather than a fear, that she was seriously ill—it is possible that even the reserved clerk may have been a closer observer than his master deemed him—but he only answered, without a change on his sallow cheek or brow, that he did not know, but should suppose, from the girl's manner, that her mistress was not very ill. The merchant thanked him, and the interview closed.

Vann left immediately, as his term of duty for that day was over, and he hurried home to his solitary tea, for he was a bachelor. An old bachelor, possibly, but it was difficult to guess Vann's age; he might have been eight or nine and twenty, or eight or nine and thirty—or older still. He lived in a meaner neighbourhood and in a meaner style than he should have done, for, although a clerk on a little over one hundred pounds a year must be a poor man, comparatively, yet he need not live in a single room at the back of a second floor in a shabby street, nor need he always wear a long greatcoat of poor aspect, and fitting so badly as to suggest its having been bought at second-hand.

At the corner of the dull street in which he lived was a baker's shop—one of those bright, brass-railed, plate-glass-fitted places, dazzling with the number and brilliancy of the gas-jets, which are often seen in poor neighbourhoods—and as he walked past, Vann lingered, and looked in. Not as a purchaser looks, albeit it was the shop where such purchases as he required were made: he looked at the inmates. He looked at the stout, heavily-built proprietor, who, in his light-coloured

coat, stood in the middle of the shop talking to a customer. Vann bowed when he caught his eye; the tradesman gave a very slight nod in return, and turned away. Vann looked at the shopwoman serving at the counter, and at the baker's daughter, who was writing at the little railed-in desk at the back of the shop. He loitered as long as he decently could, and then hurried off, knowing as well as possible that although Miss Bessy Capelmann had never once looked up, yet that she was fully aware he was gazing at her. He felt, moreover, that although he had never spoken a syllable to her beyond the most prosaic words of business, that she knew—and laughed at him because it was so—he was over head and ears in love with a giddy girl of less than half his age, who was, too, as all the neighbourhood could tell, engaged to young Mr Banner, the son of old Banner, the rich ironmonger. Vann knew this last fact; but although he made strenuous efforts to overcome his weakness, and had made, moreover, solemn resolves, all tending the same way, he found, as many a better man has done, that when a man is in love, especially hopeless love, it is of little consequence what resolves or efforts he makes. It sounds comical and ridiculous to talk of the woes of a man in a shabby greatcoat, who is in love with his baker's daughter, but there was nothing comical about it to Vann, who was as wretched, and as real in his wretchedness as any lover of romance.

He reached home, and sitting down to his solitary tea, and trimming his small lamp, saw that two letters were lying on the table. He opened the first, and took from thence a large printed sheet of very thin paper; the second contained a note, partly in manuscript and partly in type. Over these he meditated while he drank his tea. 'I see,' he muttered, 'that she is in great form to-day; they are taking twelve about her freely. Binns has laid me fifteen—I wish it was in pounds. I have only a shilling or two to last until the end of the month'—while speaking, he had produced a leathern purse—and the interest of these things, turning over a number of pawnbroker's duplicates, 'is all nearly due. If old Perrow is going to give me anything for this private business, I wish he would do it at once: a pound or two on this race would fetch up a lot of my losses. But there—he won't.' With a sigh as he arrived at this conclusion, the clerk closed his purse, then, having finished his tea, turned to the fire, which he had lighted on coming in, and began to smoke. This appeared to be his only solace, for he did not read, save so far as studying the sheet previously mentioned, or some small 'handicap' books, was concerned. The note which he had received, too, was frequently looked at, and it was plain, from one or two remarks which escaped him, that he was speculating in his mind as to whether the animal which he had backed was still in 'form' or not. This appeared to give him great anxiety; at last he muttered: 'It's a long way, I know, and it's a nasty night, but I may as well be walking there, as sitting in this confounded hole. I'll go and see what they are doing at the *Dover*.' So, without more ado, he knocked the ashes from his pipe, put on his long greatcoat, and went out, taking care to pass the baker's, and stopping to say a few words to the proprietor, who was lounging at the door. He received very little encouragement



from the baker, who was, indeed, barely civil to him; but his time was not wholly wasted, for while he was speaking, Miss Bessy, with the most natural and engaging unconsciousness in the world, tripped to her father's side, and asked him some question relative to the books on which she was engaged. The baker, who spoke rather thickly and hoarsely, answered her with as much indifference as if she had been the journeyman; and the girl, sending one swift and apparently accidental glance right through the stranger, went back to her desk. Taking a very hasty leave of the tradesman, Vann went his way towards the west end of London.

His goal was a well-known rendezvous where, at that time, betting-men of all ranks met in the evening, and although not rivalling Tattersall's in its importance, yet ranked as a very respectable auxiliary to the 'Corner'; and here Vann listened greedily in the vicinity of those whom he knew to be large speculators, or bookmakers. With the freemasonry of the turf, he soon got into conversation with a man who had been there all the evening, and was gratified to learn that *Apparition*, his selected animal, was being backed heavily. In the course of half-an-hour, as they sat over their ale, Vann and his new acquaintance grew confidential, as men with a common and absorbing pursuit will do; and the clerk was enabled to give some information respecting a certain Derby outsider, which impressed his companion so much as to induce him to make a special entry in his pocket-book. He also declared his intention of backing the horse; and then and there proclaimed his willingness to 'stand a fiver to nothing,' or, in other words, to give Vann five pounds if it won. At this moment a voice close behind them asking, 'What is *Apparition's* price?' caused them both to look round and utter short exclamations, although from very different motives. 'This is a fortunate fellow,' whispered the stranger: 'he is often here, and is the best judge going. I knew him a long time ago, when I was abroad, but he was too much of a swell to know me then, and he's more so now.'

'Indeed,' said Vann. 'I have seen him also in the City. Where was he abroad?'

'Oh, well, it was abroad,' said the stranger, who did not seem disposed to enlarge on that subject. 'It's very likely you have seen him in the City, for he's one of the great firm of Perrow and Son. Hark!'

'Then you can book me two hundred and fifty to twenty-five about the mare,' said Mr Ambrose Perrow.

'Very good, sir,' returned a little dark man. Some bank-notes changed hands, a couple of lines were written; the transaction was complete; and the next comer was informed that nine to one was the highest possible price which could be laid against *Apparition*.

'So he is a lucky fellow, is he?' resumed Vann. 'I am glad to hear it, for I have already backed the mare. Was he always lucky?'

'O yes, I daresay he was,' said the man; but he said it curtly, as if he did not intend to be led on to talk. 'But I tell you it's a long time since I knew him, and I saw very little of him then: it was before he wore an eyeglass, and he had only just lost his finger; his hand was bound up through it.'

'What finger? I did not know he had lost one,' said Vann, forgetting that he was keeping his intimate business relations with the firm of Perrow and Son from his companion.

'Well, I shouldn't suppose you did,' said the other, with some little contempt in his tone: 'he isn't likely to tell everybody he meets about it. But he has lost the last finger on his left hand, as I have seen; and if you ever meet him again, you notice if he don't always keep his glove on that hand.'

'Well,' returned Vann, with a short laugh, 'I don't suppose I shall see him again in a hurry. However, I am very glad to find he is lucky. If *Apparition* wins the big steeple-chase, I will meet you here to have a glass the night after the race.'

'It's a bargain; I'll be here!' exclaimed the other. And the two shook hands, and parted; for it had grown late.

As Vann left the hall, he muttered to himself: 'It's very odd I never noticed that the governor had lost a finger; but now I come to think of it, he always does wear a glove on his left hand. I somehow think I shall win now, as he is on the same suit; and if I do, and can only get hold of what he is backing in future'—The prospect of doing this, and the consequences to which it might lead, engrossed Vann sufficiently to occupy him until he reached home, where his last waking thoughts were regrets that he had not a little money by him to put on *Apparition*. For the vista which success in betting opened led up through as fairy-like a perspective as he could imagine to where rosy, plump Bessy Capelmann stood. Fortune favoured Vann, for on the very next day Mr Perrow, senior, in the same quiet way in which all their business had been managed, gave him five pounds as a return for his trouble in acting for him extra officially. A great part of this was invested on *Apparition*, who came to be first favourite; and, as there is no reason for dwelling on this part of our story, we may briefly say, she won. Whatever Mr Ambrose Perrow's gains might have been, he was hardly likely to shew by his manner at the office that he had been successful; nevertheless, his clerk could quite rival him in his power of repressing all show of exultation. Nor did any alteration of dress or manner reveal to his fellow-clerks that Vann had won money: he had for years betted to the uttermost farthing of his means, had known what it was to peril and lose his last shilling, even to leaving himself without the means of providing a meal, and had had his gleams of success. So he was hardened; and although more and more eager after money, as men will grow who follow this practice, yet he was devoid of impulse in such matters. In addition to the good fortune just detailed, the outsider won the Derby; and Vann's friend kept his promise, as, to their credit be it said, most betting-men do. So affairs looked brighter for the clerk than they had done for a long time past, and although, as we have said, he made no change at the office, yet he did so at home. Not only did he buy new clothes, and even new gloves, but the climax of his weakness was in actually going to church that he might have the pleasure of sitting near Bessy Capelmann.

He was successful; he saw her during the whole of the service, and had the pleasure, too, of seeing

her read from the same book and sing from the same hymns as did young Mr Banner. Despite of this discouraging state of things, the clerk lingered about the porch until he saw the group coming out, when, with a lame pretence of having just come out also, he assumed an air of great surprise, and spoke to Mr Capelmann. He was again not without his reward, for at that moment Bessy dropped her church service. Vann, being close to her, had the happiness to pick it up and restore it, receiving in return such a smile, and such a look, and a few such sweet-sounding words, as sent him home half giddy with excitement and augmented love.

At the weekly attendance of Mr Spires the verger on the following Thursday for the purpose of letting sittings, one was taken by Frederick Vann, Esquire; this gentleman, in spite of Mr Spires' advice, choosing a seat in about the least eligible pew in the whole church, where, as the old clerk remarked, 'you couldn't hear much, and could see nothing.' But even church officials are not infallible.

#### CHEMISTRY IN THE KITCHEN.

OF all the services which industrial chemistry is likely to give us, those which concern the alimentation of the people are perhaps the most valuable, and are accepted as such by the mass. Chemists have perfectly understood this, and have proved it, by the numerous attempts they have made to furnish us with fresh articles of food, or, above all, to enable us to draw the best particles from those we already possess. Of a humble and unattractive appearance, these preparations do not draw the eye of the crowd, and pass unnoticed by many; there is nothing in their exterior quality, colour, or form, to excite curiosity. Their merit rests entirely in the principles which have directed their fabrication, and in the applications that may be made of them; they permit us to point out theory growing into practice, and how purely speculative knowledge may assist various trades.

Ever since the war in the Crimea, efforts have been made for the preservation of milk; the want of it during that time of trial was seriously felt, and the problem to be resolved was, how to produce, in the smallest possible size, a nourishing beverage, which might be weakened with water when the time arrived to make use of it. If this were discovered, the sale would be large for ships on long voyages where it was not convenient to take a cow; in fortresses, or for armies in the field. Even in households, there might be times when such a preparation would be advantageous, but it concerns them less directly. The first object the managers had in view was, to procure the best kind of milk, drawn from healthy cows, and fed on fertile pastures in the open air—not, in fact, stalled. This is heated in large flat-bottomed vessels, to which is added white sugar in a fixed proportion; whilst it is heating, continual stirring is necessary, to favour evaporation. When the quantity is reduced to one-fifth, this concentrated liquid is poured into cylindrical boxes, which are immediately closed by tin solder, to be wholly impervious to the air. The boxes thus filled are arranged in a steam-boiler heated to about a hundred and four degrees. When this process is

finished, the preserved milk is ready: if, after a time, the box is opened, it will be found filled with a thick substance of a yellow white colour, and semi-transparent. Mixed with five times its weight of water, a liquid is produced presenting the appearance and offering all the character of ordinary milk. It may cause some surprise to the person mixing it to see that what is translucent as long as it is a paste, becomes opaque when placed in water. This is simply due to a phenomenon in the refraction of light. The globules being endowed with a different angle of refraction from the water, the rays of light which regularly traverse either the globules alone or the pure water, take a very irregular and broken line in the mixture of the two. It is found that this milk after being opened will keep for ten days or more, especially if care is taken always to skim a layer off the top, thus removing the surface in contact with the atmospheric air and those fermented particles which may have formed upon it.

It is not difficult to explain why the process just described should be attended with a successful result. When liquid matter is heated so as to reduce it to a fifth of its primitive volume, it is nothing less than taking away the greater part of the watery particles it contains. Milk contains about thirteen parts in a hundred of sugary, fat, cheesy, and saline substances; the remaining eighty-seven parts are water: after the concentration, the proportion of water is reduced to thirty-five parts. It is well known that the presence of water has a predominating influence on the development of many kinds of fermentation; the less water, the more the chances of preservation are increased. The sugar which is first added to the milk in a considerable quantity is also an antiseptic; it is upon this quality that the confectioner's art and all the domestic preparation of preserved fruits are based. To give an idea of the efficacy with which sugar overcomes fermentation and consequent decay, it has sometimes been observed that in barrels of molasses, which have come from the colonies, the bodies of small insects have been perfectly preserved. The last process is not the least important—that which keeps the milk for some time at a high temperature, to destroy the vitality of the fermenting particles it contains. The atmosphere that we breathe is loaded with these, which fall upon all bodies exposed to the air, and develop themselves by decomposing when favourable conditions are to be found. These particles become completely inactive, are killed, in fact, by heat of about a hundred degrees. As care has been taken hermetically to close the boxes against the air, no fresh elements can enter to replace those that have been destroyed. There is still one improvement to be desired, the preserved milk retains the flavour of boiled milk; but probably this defect will be removed in time by improved processes.

Domestic economy, it may be said, has little to do with what has just been described; but there is another process with which chemists have been occupied relating more particularly to it—this is to improve the old way of preserving hams by salting and smoking. Without changing that system, which in its way is excellent, the application of it may be made more regular and complete; and it is found that the results present a real superiority over the former plan. Nothing is more simple

than the theory of salting meat: kitchen salt has a great affinity for water; it draws towards it that which is contained in the muscular fibres of meat when it comes in contact with it. It is by the absorption of water, as well as by the antiseptic qualities which it possesses, that it prevents fermentation. But this absorption in ordinary salting is very irregular; whilst the outer parts of a piece of meat are saturated with salt, contracting and hardening it to the serious disadvantage of the eaters, the centre is almost withdrawn from the antiseptic action of the salt. Much of this may be diminished by adding a proportion of sugar, which makes the surface desiccation less powerful; but it is only a palliative, not reaching the original evil. After this irregular salting, the meat is submitted to the action of smoke; the tar proceeding from the combustion of wood, especially the creosote, penetrates into the pores and between the fibres, paralysing or destroying the germs of cryptogamic vegetation and fermentation. The more the action of the smoke is prolonged, penetrating deeply and in an efficacious manner, the more the flavour of the meat is likely to be spoiled by the predominant flavour which these pyrogenous matters have when condensed.

The improvement sought for is produced by giving precision to the quantities and regularity of action over the whole mass submitted to salting and smoking. This is the course of operation. As soon as the pieces of pork come to the kitchen, the weight of each is written down in chalk on a black board. The salt is employed in a liquid state, the dissolution being proportioned in the same quantities for all meat; so that, by a calculation made beforehand, it is known how much saline mixture must be given to the weight of each piece. The reservoir containing this is placed on a higher stage, and communicates with the operator by a flexible india-rubber pipe, terminating in a slender metallic tube with a tap. Each ham is laid on the scale; whilst in the other is the weight, not only of the ham, but of the salt which must be added to it. The workman introduces the tube into the ham at the thin end, and then turns the tap; the saline liquid forced into the cellular tissues by the pressure from the reservoir, equal to a column of water of about sixteen feet high, insinuates itself between the muscles, and swells the mass in a very apparent manner, at the same time the weight increases. At the precise moment when the ham has received the proper amount of salt, the weight in the other scale falls, and the workman closes the tap. Thus the salting has penetrated to the interior; and to insure the preparation of all the exterior, the hams are steeped for a few days in a tub filled with the same liquid. From this they are carried to the smoking-chamber, a large room, into which open two chimneys communicating with fires in a lower story. The smoke arising from the combustion of wood spreads through the space at the same time as it warms the air; thus the hams are partially dried as well as smoked. Thermometers are hung in different places, and are visible from the outside, so that the temperature is carefully regulated. The only wood used is very dry oak; thus the pyroigneous properties are always identical. The weight of wood to be burned has been made with equal precision, according to the amount of smoke it gives out; for the quantity of air introduced into the stoves is always proportioned to the weight

of wood, and consequently the combustion goes on invariably under the same conditions.

Thus constant results are obtained, and nothing is left to chance: the success has justified the hopes of the inventor, M. Martin de Lignac. The meat prepared in his manufactory has been highly appreciated by consumers. Many agriculturists, who formerly used a more or less imperfect mode of salting their pigs, have adopted his method. If there is additional expense, they are sure, on the other hand, of having hams which never fail to be well preserved, and about which they feel no anxiety; and in addition to these proofs of popular favour, the gold medal of the last International Exhibition in Paris was awarded to him.

Let us turn to another very important trade which has arisen within the last few years—that of German yeast. Taking up the idea that chemists had formed, that yeast was a vegetation which grew in the vats of breweries, some persons in Austria and Moravia began to cultivate this particular kind of leaven, which should be free from the strong odour and bitterness of malt. In this way they have succeeded in developing the qualities, and producing a fermenting substance endowed with remarkable power, which, in a very small compass, gives better results than any other kind that housekeepers have adopted. It is a gray, firm paste, crumbling at the touch, and exhaling a slightly sour odour. As heat changes it quickly, it could not have been available in other countries before the establishment of railways; it spoils much in the same way as animal matters in a state of putrefaction. This is how it is manufactured; and besides the yeast, some accessory productions are obtained as alcohol, and a residuum of a kind of malt which is used for the fattening of cows and sheep.

Three kinds of grain, maize, rye, and malted barley, after having been reduced to powder and mixed together, are macerated in water at a temperature of sixty-five or seventy degrees. Under these conditions, the active principle previously developed in the barley reacts on the starch, and transforms it into two other products immediately soluble, called dextrine and glucose, which are analogous to grape-sugar. At the end of a few hours, this sacchariferous process is complete; the liquid is racked off and refined, whilst alcoholic fermentation is produced by introducing a small quantity of leaven, reserved from a previous operation. Under the action of the leaven, the glucose is divided into carbonic acid, alcohol, and other accessories. At the same time, the dextrine, in which the sugary process is no longer retarded by an excess of glucose, gradually transforms itself into glucose; under this new form, it submits to the mysterious action of the leaven, and contributes towards enriching the liquor with an additional quantity of alcohol; whilst the carbonic acid, rendered free, disengages itself in the form of gas. A question naturally presents itself to the mind: How does the leaven act? and why does it decompose the glucose? Unfortunately, among the many different replies which have been made to this question, there is none which is completely satisfactory. The only certain thing is, that the globules of leaven are reproduced by a sort of budding process, giving birth at first to the most minute particles, which grow rapidly, reaching the largest dimensions that these corpuscles ever

present; that is to say, about the three-thousandth part of a foot. In this mode of manufacturing yeast, care is taken to furnish these vegetables, by the composition of the malt in which they are developed, with a much richer nourishment than the malt of ordinary breweries. This is the essential principle of this new preparation. On this account, the vital activity of the fermentation is much greater. The carbonic acid disengages itself in such abundance, that the leaven drawn up with it floats on the liquid, forming a thick foam. It is clear that these are the most powerful globules which are thus raised and sustained on the surface by the bubbles of gas. They are skimmed off as they appear, leaving the less active leaven at the bottom of the vat. Before despatching it to every country, there is nothing to be done but to drain it, wash it slightly on a sheet, and, in order to render it less impervious to the action of the air and heat, to submit it to the hydraulic press, which eliminates the greater part of the liquid. In this state it may be preserved for eight or fifteen days, according to the season.

When examined by the help of a microscope, this leaven is composed of ovate granules, transparent, and of regular size; the greater part are of the size mentioned above; whilst a few, which may be called the young ones, do not reach a quarter of that diameter. It is evidently owing to the abundance of nutritive principles which are furnished at the moment when it is formed, and to other favourable arrangements, that the German yeast owes the very rich composition and vigorous vitality with which it is endowed. For example, maize-flour possesses three times as much of fatty substances as barley or wheat flour; and this is one of the causes of the large proportion which is found in the pressed yeast, as it is sometimes called, the glucose also assisting in this respect. It is the same with the azotic or mineral compositions, which make the German yeast so much more valuable than the brewer's yeast; endowed as it is with greater energy, half the quantity produces a more regular and active fermentation. Every housekeeper will allow that bread made with it is lighter than the other; this is owing to the disengagement of the gas being more uniform, the dough is more homogeneous, and, consequently, better raised. Owing to the mode of preparation, it contains neither the bitter flavour nor the strongly scented essential oil of the hop.

Leaving these home manufactures, the last example of the power of chemistry will be found in the immense prairies of La Plata and Australia. Here wander innumerable flocks of sheep and cattle; a vigorous vegetation, favoured by a warm climate and the humid salt emanations from the sea, provides abundance of nourishment; animals prosper and multiply amazingly. The South American hunters are numerous also; and the number of cattle killed every month may be counted by hundreds of thousands, so that the wonder is that they do not wholly disappear. In former days, this rough sport was carried on for the sake of the hides and wool only; the flesh, bones, and sinews were too difficult of transport and preservation for this rudimentary trade, and lay abandoned on the spot. Some persons interested themselves to utilise more fully these waifs and strays of the chase. At first, it was proposed to export the bones to England and France. In

civilised countries they have acquired a commercial value which covers the price of the freight; they are largely used by the cutlers; gelatine is extracted from them; by burning them, the substance is obtained which clarifies sugar; phosphorus is made from them, and lastly, they furnish the most valuable manure for the agriculturist.

As for the skins, the country not offering the necessary resources for the establishment of tanneries, they were exported in a fresh state. A new agent, phenic acid, preserved them from any alteration during the voyage. It is the best antiseptic known; there is no animal fermentation which can resist it, no putrefaction that it does not arrest. After this, there only remained the flesh to perish for want of suitable means of preservation. The employment of phenic acid could not be thought of; excellent as it is for the purification of stables, houses, and hospitals, it does not answer for articles of food. Though it has been purified so as to obtain colourless crystals, it always has an odour of the coal-tar from which it is extracted, which gives a flavour to the meat. In default of a modern antiseptic, another was tried, less efficacious, and as old as civilisation—common salt; but no decisive result was obtained: it did not give complete security, and it did not yet appear possible economically to preserve the meat which was left to perish.

The well-known chemist, Dr Liebig, directed his researches in another way; instead of exporting the flesh, he wished to concentrate on the spot, and in a small compass, the principal nutritive elements; to obtain an extract of meat, which, when it reached England, might be weakened by thirty times its weight of water, and give a liquid having all the essential qualities of ordinary beef-tea. This new commercial production has been largely consumed in England and Germany; it is used in the navy, and in distant colonies where food is difficult to obtain; but in France, where refinement of taste is greater, the success has not been so general. This is the manner in which it is prepared; the process is very simple, and suited to the primitive state of the country: After the animal is killed, the meat is cut very small, and steeped in an equal quantity of water; this is boiled for a quarter of an hour, when the whole is thrown into a linen cloth, and the liquid which passes through is the beef-tea in its normal state. There is, however, too large a proportion of water, and some fat, which would interfere with its keeping. The hydraulic press is applied to the mass of meat which is left after straining; and thus pressed it forms a sort of cake, which is considered to be exhausted of all eatable particles; a residue which at some future time will probably be turned to a useful purpose. The liquid is again heated, and the fat being carefully skimmed off the top, it is boiled down to one-sixth of its original volume, and brought to the consistency of extract, keeping it from all contact with the air in a vessel where a vacuum has been made by means of a pneumatic pump. Nothing more is wanting but to pour it into jars hermetically closed, and sealed with a leaden seal, to preserve them from adulteration.

The first commercial inferiority of the extract of meat arises from the fact, that for the same quantity of nutritive elements, it costs more than ordinary broth; so that it need never be supposed that the flocks of South America and Australia will reduce



in any manner the price of butcher-meat here. Besides this objection, the extract during its preparation loses a part of its aroma, and contracts a slightly acid flavour, which becomes more apparent the stronger the infusion is made; and finally, there is a deep colour, which is always avoided in the domestic preparation. The greater part of these disadvantages will probably disappear when the company has perfected its apparatus. Instead of the flesh being chopped by men, the machines used here for that purpose would do it much more quickly, and with less waste. The alteration of the liquid during concentration, both in colour and flavour, might be prevented by the use of the system employed by the sugar-refiners—vessels heated by steam.

The cakes of pressed meat too, containing, as they do, fibrine, albumen, phosphate of magnesia, and chalk, ought to be put to some use; if nothing better can be found, at least it would not be difficult to make them into a manure of unexceptionable richness. The bones also, which are now used to heat the caldrons, might find a more remunerative destination. It ought to be possible to lower the price to a quarter of its present value; and we need not doubt that the chemists who have already done so much for us, will make every effort to improve and cheapen such a valuable addition to our diet.

## BIM. AMONG THE BEASTS.

### CHAPTER I.—THE SPECULATING BEAVER.

'To see Skiddaw's Peak is a wonderful sight,' says the old proverb, 'but to hear Skiddaw speak is much more surprising;' similarly, to see the Beaver had been an agreeable surprise to Bim, but to hear him was a still more unexpected pleasure.

The animal was a very common specimen of his genus, too—with long chestnut hair, such as his enemies would have called 'red,' much soiled with mud; and claws that looked as if he were a pastry-cook in the dirt-pie line. He stood on his hind legs, leaning his fore-paws against the wire of the enclosure, and looked up at our young friend as inquisitively as he looked at him.

'I had no idea that beavers could talk,' exclaimed Abimelech, 'though I knew they could make dams and lodges. What very intelligent animals you must be!'

'Ah! you may say that; but I was not always a beaver. I was once a speculative builder. Observe my flat paddle-shaped tail; that used to be my trowel. I work in mud now, but there was a time when I dabbled in bricks and mortar. Have you never read of Pythagoras?'

Abimelech scratched his little head; but that only affected the surface. If there was anything inside it about Pythagoras (which I doubt), it did not appear.

'I see you have not,' said the beaver, with a look of rather low cunning. 'Don't distress yourself on that account; no more have I. But I have heard about him from the Secretary Bird, who knows everything. He was the first man who found out that beasts had once been men: that men are often beasts, you have probably discovered for yourself.'

'Well, I have heard it said,' replied Abimelech hesitatingly, 'that our schoolmaster is a beast;

but that was by very ill-behaved boys, and it was thought to be very rude.'

'Was it? Well, that's a matter of opinion. If they had called him a beaver, it would have been a compliment. What you must all come to, however, is not dust, as you think, but fur and feathers. All men sooner or later become animals. If they have been bad men, they transmigrate into the bodies of bad beasts, of which there is here a large assortment; while the good men become beavers.'

'I see,' said Abimelech; but I am almost afraid he didn't.

'There are some wise races,' continued Castor Fiber, 'who, even as men, are almost equal to Rodents.'

'I know,' cried Bim, with the vivacity of a sharp little boy in class who is afraid that the one question he can answer will not come down to him. 'You're a Rodent: I've read that in Wood.'

'The Siamese, for instance,' pursued the beaver, without regarding this egotistic interruption, 'never destroy animals, for fear they should thereby kill their relatives, with the exception of the white elephant, whom they believe to have been their mother-in-law. Similarly, the Banians of India—sometimes, from this conscientious abstemiousness, termed Banyans—are not only vegetarians, but will redeem any animal who is about to be killed, and suffer it to go at large. These nations, however, are honourable exceptions. I daresay you have eaten innocent sucking-pig without a twinge.'

'I ate it once,' reflected Abimelech, 'though not without several twinges; the doctor said they were caused by the rich crackling and the currant sauce. It was the first day we came to Bantling Terrace; but I shall never forget it.'

'You live in Bantling Terrace, do you?' squeaked the beaver merrily. 'O my tail and teeth! Well, that is a good one. Why, I ran up those houses myself.'

'Not lately, did you?' said Bim, simply. 'I should very much like to have seen you at it.'

'I mean, I built 'em, you silly boy. I built 'em with this very trowel, and that is why I am here in the mud and muck, instead of holding my head up with the giraffe and the best of them. The fact is, I scamped the work. You find the drains are a little odoriferous, don't you? And you can hear all that's going on in the next house? Well, you are indebted for those advantages to me.' Here his light tone altered to one of deep contrition. 'But to jest at such conduct only befits the laughing jackass. My object (alas!) was to sell 'em, not to do my duty by 'em; and that's why I'm a beaver.' The poor animal flapped its paws, and beat its tail about in a manner quite deplorable to witness.

'I thought you said that all beavers had been good men?' said Abimelech, whose own name (as you remember) means (in the original) the Soul of Truth.

'I daresay I did. I am as great a liar now as I always was. You can't get on as a speculating builder without it; I defy you to do it. Look at the mortgagees.'

Bim looked about him, but saw nothing, except the beaver in tears.

'Yes, young gentleman, I was too clever by half. "It is much better to be good than to be clever," as the lord-mayor told the excellent Francis Good-

child when he set him to build the Mansion House, and took away the contract from Thomas Idle. Why, we beavers are all *born with our eyes open*, and yet what comes of it? Nothing. It is much better to be born virtuous and with a silver spoon in your mouth—you may take my word for that. O dear! O dear!

Bim. had half a mind to inquire what the beaver would have done with a silver spoon if he *had* been born with it; but he did not like to intrude upon his distress with such trivialities.

'May I ask, Mr Castor Fiber,' said he, 'if you were all *peculating* builders?'

'I did not say "*peculating*," sir—I said "*speculating*,"' answered the beaver indignantly, his chestnut hair becoming very red indeed.

'I beg your pardon,' replied Bim. humbly; 'I thought it was the same thing.'

'So it is,' answered the beaver sharply; 'but it is not good manners to say so. No; they weren't all like me. The others were worse. Cast your eye on that tumble-down lodge of ours! Ain't it enough to make one's hair gray, and one's tail curl, to think that educated people should come and look at that and say: "Oh, that's a beaver lodge, is it? Well, if that's Castor Fiber's idea of a comfortable residence, we think he is easily satisfied; it seems to us that his intelligence has been considerably overrated. As for his dams—the less said about them the better." Of course, they can't think well of us, with such a miserable edifice before their eyes; and the expression of their opinion (for we hear every word that's said) is no small part of our punishment. We have all "*scamped*" our work, or neglected it when we were human beings, but we have not all been builders. That fellow there, yonder, who is just diving under water, was a submarine engineer in his time, and as designing a rogue as ever drew plan: there was no villainy he wouldn't compass, under pretence of "*facilitating* the intercourse of the great family of man." Did you never hear of the projected tunnel to China that was to be built under the sea, and lined with porcelain?—that was the very man that brought it out. He had a beautiful office in Queer Street, but there was nothing in it; even the motto of the company, *Ubique sub mari*, was borrowed from that of the artillery and the marines; its arms were a willow-pattern plate; but it all went to smash, because it had not a leg to stand on.—How *are* you?'

This last remark was carelessly addressed to another beaver, who had come up from the water, and was beginning to dig vigorously in the wet earth. 'Stop a bit, till he gets well under the mud (which is his proper place),' whispered Castor Fiber, 'and you shall hear who *he* is. He's looking for a bit of coke, and I'll tell you why. He used to be a railway engineer, and made all his money, very disgracefully, out of the coal contracts. For my part, I should have been ashamed to have soiled my paws with such a thing. Wouldn't you?'

Abimelech made no reply; he did not like water, as has been confessed, and was conscious that his own hands were far from clean.

'Who is that very shiny-looking beaver,' inquired he (by way of changing the conversation), 'sitting in the sun yonder upon his hind-legs, and doing nothing particular?'

'He's an idiot,' answered the other contemptuously. 'That is, he's "*an idler*," which is, in our

society, what drones are among the bees. You can easily guess what *he* was when he was a man, by his very looks.'

Bim. couldn't guess at all; to his eyes, the shiny-looking beaver only looked like a new hat, and he said so.

'That's very rude, young gentleman,' said Castor Fiber, in an offended tone; 'your remark is most obnoxious. Is it possible that you have never heard the proverb: "*Never speak of hats in a beaver lodge*." However, you are young, and have at least the delicacy to wear a cloth cap. That shiny creature—"highly polished" is his own expression—was once a person of title, which, after a fashion, he still retains; he is called *de* Beaver (but spelled *de* Beauvoir).'

'Did he never build anything when he was a man?'

'Not he; except a few Castles in the air, and some Expectations upon the death of an uncle, which never came to anything. And yet he always lived—I won't do the bird-world the injustice to say "*like a fighting-cock*," but—on the fat of the land. He was born an Honourable, which was considered highly meritorious, and which really was a very great Credit to him, for, simply because of it, tradesmen served him without question, and bankers lent him money. If I'd had his advantages—But, bah! it puts my beaver up (our expression for a just indignation) to think of it.'

'But, surely,' urged Abimelech, 'there *must* have been something in him beside his having been born an Honourable?'

'You must be most uncommon young,' said the beaver, scratching his nose with his claw, 'to think that he wanted anything more. You're not at a public school, I suppose?'

'Not yet,' said Bim., colouring; 'but I hope to go to one next Easter year.'

'Ah, well, when you do go, you'll see whether it isn't a good thing to be born a *de* Beaver. Why, common boys are sent there by their parents on purpose to rub against the shiny sort, to get the perfume.'

'What's that?' inquired Abimelech.

'The flavour of aristocracy, my young friend. It's a subtle essence, not easily to be detected (and indeed I never smelt it myself), but always sold at a fancy price. Have you never heard of *castoreum*?'

'O yes,' answered Bim., with a shudder down the small of his back, 'and very disagreeable stuff it is. I had some the morning after I ate the sucking-pig. Talk of the pleasure of having a silver spoon in your mouth—suppose it should be full of castor-oil! Ugh!'

The coarse but good-natured beaver put his paws to his sides and fairly squealed with laughter.

'O my tail and teeth, but this is too good!' cried he. 'Here's a boy as thinks I've been painting the attractions of castor-oil. Castoreum is a very different thing, as any beaver will tell you. It is exactly the same sort of essence among us as is the flavour of aristocracy among men.'

'I remember now,' said Abimelech; 'but I thought you all had it.'

'So we have; one has just as much of it as another, and more. It is only that fools have fancies. Mr Sleek-coat yonder happens to have a reputation for his castoreum, and it's astonishing how he is sought after. To see one's fellow-

creatures abase themselves before that idle vagabond, is sickening to a plain honest'—

'I beg your pardon,' said Abimelech; 'I didn't catch that last word.'

'I say it's disgusting,' continued the beaver, raising his voice, and gesticulating with his forepaws, 'quite disgusting that intelligent animals should go sniffing about that fellow as if he were a flower-bed. I have known them sniff and squeak and stand on two legs when they got near him, just as your people bow and scrape and go on all-fours in the presence of a lord. I only wish I had known about castoreum when I was a delegate.'

'Perhaps it might have done you good,' observed Bim, thinking he said 'delicate.'

'It never did anybody good, sir, and never will. I say, I wish when I had been delegate of the Democratic Builders, that I had known of this infirmity among the beavers, that I might have illustrated by it the sycophancy of mankind. Why should all this fuss be made about that worthless fellow? Ain't I also a beaver and a brother? Because I wipe my mouth with the back of my forepaw (a habit common to the building-trades, and especially after taking liquid refreshment), is that a reason why this shiny and useless'— Here the beaver stopped short, sat on his hind-legs, and seemed to listen attentively. At the same time, an odour as of pomatum, such as folk discover in their hats when they look into them at church, pervaded the ambient air.

'I think I heard Mr De Beaver mention my name; didn't you?'

'Well, you see, you have not told me what it is,' urged Bim.

'Just so, just so.' (The beaver's attention was evidently riveted elsewhere.) 'I don't think my ears deceived me. He surely said "Badlaw, Badlaw"—I used to be honest Joe Badlaw, builder and democrat—he calls me "Badlaw," I do assure you, quite familiarly.' The beaver was turning his forepaws one over the other in a state of great excitement and expectation, and sniffing as though he would sniff his nose off.

'My dear young friend, you must excuse me. If I am not greatly mistaken, Mr De Beaver is about to favour us with some castoreum. For further information, see handbills—apply to the Sec'— And not even waiting to finish the sentence, the beaver plunged into the water, and sought the lodge, to which his noble friend had already preceded him.

## A GOLDEN SORROW.

### CHAPTER XVII.—WARNING.

BEFORE that evening, Walter had received intimations from Spoiled Five which had occasioned him some uneasiness. In his desultory, exceptional sort of life among the busy community, all labouring after a similar fashion for a common end, he heard and saw much which he was quite unsuspected of knowing. It was probably fortunate for him that he was unsuspected, for he might otherwise have incurred some risk, as it was extremely improbable that the dangerous members of that mixed community would have understood the paradoxical fidelity which was one of his chief characteristics.

Ireland is prolific of 'informers'—the executive has, unhappily, never been at a loss for such

despicable and corrupt tools with which to do the inevitable dirty work of government—and yet there is no country in the world in which the 'informer' is held in such ruthless detestation. No matter what befalls him, however terrible his fate, the popular verdict is, 'served him right.' The wretch who betrays his fellow-men for the government pay is a moral leper, a creature absolutely apart and debarred from all human pity, one who earns his filthy wages carrying his life in his hand, and when he loses it, is just so much dead carrion. Similarly, there is nothing in the social system of France more admirable, which makes a deeper impression on the foreign observer, than the parental and filial relations as we see them there; and yet there is no country in the world in which the hideous crime of parricide, held by the ancients to be virtually impossible, is so frequent, or perpetrated under circumstances so appalling, and from motives so depraved.

Spoiled Five had the true Irish horror and hatred of an 'informer,' carried to its extreme; for supposing he had been mixed up in any equivocal transaction, not only would he have regarded the betrayal of a comrade as an abominable sin, but he had a deeply rooted aversion to being a party to any kind of detection whatever. He was a perfectly honest, sober individual himself, singularly industrious and tranquil in all his ways, and so little given to conviviality, that he sometimes risked his popularity with his rough though rarely unkind employers, by his lack of disposition to drink and smoke, and his scanty appreciation of howling joviality. But he had a native lawlessness in him; he hated police; he would have lent a hand to the rope which should hang a spy, any day; while his usual vigilance and keen intelligence would be suffered to slumber strangely, if the matter in hand were the bringing of any other kind of delinquent into 'trouble.'

Without fully understanding his character in these respects, Walter Clint had an impression that in conveying to him a warning that he would do well to send the dust lately washed to the nearest station for purchase by the bankers without delay, Spoiled Five had given a strong proof of his attachment. He had not given any explanation, but had merely pressed the matter as an earnest request, muttering something vague about 'quare people' being about. Walter had told Daly what Spoiled Five had said, and found him unwilling to attach any great importance to it. Everything had been very quiet lately, and they had not had any reason for apprehension in consequence of the isolation of their hut. Neither rumour nor their own observation led them to believe that there was any fresh element of disorder, any addition to the average of rowdiness, in the place. They had not any large quantity of 'dust' ready, and, but for the finding of the nugget, which was, they had no doubt, of very considerable value, they would not have thought of profiting by the approaching opportunity of transmitting what they had to the station, with the security afforded by numbers. But the finding of the nugget made all the difference, and it was arranged that Walter should join the expedition.

It was with singular approbation that Spoiled Five heard this. Of course it confirmed his impression that some piece of exceptional good fortune had befallen the partners; and his vexation was

proportionate to his short-lived satisfaction when the confirmation of Deering's opinion was made manifest by Daly's increasing illness. It was quite clear that Walter could not leave his friend, who continued for many days unconscious of his presence, and in a state of troubled delirium positively appalling to Spoiled Five, who, if he was not, as Walter had said, afraid of nothing else, was very distinctly afraid of that.

'Holy Virgin!' he would say, with awe, which made the ejaculation half a supplication, 'listen to him now! Isn't it dhrreadful to hear him goin' an like that; it's he must have the bad mind, I'm afeerd, though his ways is so quite and aisy.' It became so evident to Walter that their faithful assistant was becoming seriously shaken in his good opinion of Lawrence, by his wild ravings and denunciations of imaginary enemies, that he endeavoured to keep him as much away as possible. Deering laughed at the man's ignorance and at Walter's consideration, much to the indignation of Spoiled Five.

'Nothing to do with his thoughts, with his past life, his goin's on hasn't! Ay, bedad, I'm goin' to believe *that*, amn't I, for him or any other docthor! Maybe there's no Miss Kate, then; that's on his mind for some rayson best known to himself! And who's that ould Clibborn he tuk me for last night, I'd like to know; and let a roar out of him as if he was stuck wid a knife? Sure, they say when a man's dhrunk he tells the thruth, and why wouldn't he tell it when he's mad? Ay it was the docthor there, I'm thinkin' he wouldn't be too pleasant to listen to.'

After a few days, Daly's illness took a favourable turn, and he began to mend rapidly. Walter had suffered very much from both fatigue and anxiety, and was in great need of rest, when, late one night, after he had almost begun to despair of Spoiled Five's return from the store, whither he had gone to make some purchases several hours before, the man came in, and said, with great seriousness, that he had something important to tell him. His manner effectually roused Walter.

'Is Misther Daly asleep?' he asked.

'He is. Why?'

'Because, he musn't hear what I'm goin' to say. Come out behind the house with me, sir, av ye plaze.'

Walter complied. Spoiled Five planted himself against the low wall, and taking hold of Walter respectfully, by the sleeve of his red shirt, said, in a low, but decided voice, from which his habitual drawl was almost entirely banished:

'Misther Clint, you and Misther Daly has known me for a good bit now; did yez ever know me to pry into your affairs, or to make yez an impident answer, or to tell yez a lie?'

'Certainly not, Five; nothing of the kind. You have been our best friend in this strange place, and perfectly trustworthy.'

'Thank ye, sir; that's hearty, anyhow. Well, then, ye'll listen to what I tell you, and you'll be said an' led by me? Won't you?'

His ugly disfigured face, and his maimed figure, acquired intense expression from his passionate earnestness.

'Won't you?' he repeated, tightening his grasp on Walter's sleeve, slightly shaking him.

'I think so, Five. But you must speak out, before I promise.'

'I'll spake out, at laste in as far as I can; but you'll have to take my word, and not ask me for raysons, or for proofs—for that's just what I can't give you. There's quare people about, and the best men in the placers is gone to the station, and ye'll mind what I tould you afore, Misther Clint?'

Walter inclined his head in assent. He was listening eagerly, watching the man's scarred face intently.

'There's disappointed people here; and when men has come all across the world to do the kind of work that's goin' here, and meets wid disappointment, if they're anyway bad at all, they're not far off desperation. I can't say more about *that*, and I won't. I don't know what you and Misther Daly found, nor where ye found it; I didn't ask you, and I don't want to know.' He saw that Walter was going to speak, and he stopped him, by a quick movement of his mutilated hand.

'No, sir; don't tell me. I beg and pray of you not to tell me. Whatever you found, and wherever you have it, if it's about the premises, hide it—hide it, sir, somewhere away from the hut, and let *no one* but yourself know where it's hid. Do it at once, sir; do it as soon as there's light; that will be in an hour; don't let me know anything about it. Let me mind Misther Daly—I'll lie on the floor in the room, and he'll never know it isn't you; or, if he calls you, I'll have some excuse ready—but do it, Misther Clint, do it, if you want to bring what you've got safe home to them that's waitin' for you an' it. And tell me nothin' at all about it; that's all I ask for my own sake.'

'But,' said Walter, as Spoiled Five loosed his hold upon his sleeve, and stood waiting his reply, 'you will surely tell me what you apprehend, and who are the dangerous parties?'

'No, sir; I won't. I'll tell you nothin' but what I have tould you. But if ye don't mind me, if you don't be said and led by me, you and Misther Daly will only be sorry for it once, and that'll be all your life long.'

He glanced up, along the frowning face of the huge rock which rose, a black mass, behind the hut, towards the clear, steel-like sky, already beginning to flush at the approach of the swift-coming morning, then limped into the hut, and softly entering the room in which Daly was sleeping the deep, restful sleep of convalescence, curled himself up on the floor beside the locker, and resolutely shut his one eye, in dogged determination, if not in slumber.

Walter remained motionless on the little stony plateau at the back of the hut, where Spoiled Five had left him. All inclination to treat the Irishman's warning lightly had disappeared. He had no perception, no suggestion presented itself to him of the quarter from which danger was to be expected, or the form in which it might come; but he was entirely convinced by Spoiled Five's manner and his words, and he resolved at once to act upon his counsel.

The light was spreading over the face of the sky before Walter, now all unconscious of fatigue, left the spot, having matured and considered his plan of action. Then he went out, stepped down into the rugged road, and from thence rapidly climbed a stony path which led to the brow of a ravine, forming a portion of their claim, distant about a quarter of a mile from the hut. The place



was perfectly silent and solitary, the mining tools were lying about, the whole scene was peaceful. He gazed from the top of the ravine at a spot where the rugged earth was scooped deeply out under the ragged edge, and after a few minutes' search, his eye lighted on the spot he was looking for. It was a large piece of rock, which stuck out from the earth; and exactly beneath it, at an interval of about six feet, there was another—the two forming natural slabs, by whose rough sides were clumps of stringy, harsh, brownish vegetation. The lower of the two slabs was so placed that a strong active man could reach it by a spring from the winding path, which was, in fact, a dry water-course, that led upwards into the ravine, on the side opposite to that from which Walter had approached it. He once more looked cautiously all round, and rapidly retraced his steps to the hut.

A couple of hours later, when Walter had lain down in his hammock to rest, and Lawrence Daly was thinking of getting up, when the hut and its surroundings wore a most unusual aspect of stillness and idleness, Deering, making an early visit to his patient, found Spoiled Five sitting on a wooden bench before the door, arrayed in a rough leathern apron, and cleaning all the arms belonging to the establishment.

'I'm doubly glad to find you quite off the sick-list,' said Deering, after he and Daly had talked for some time, 'because I shall have no hesitation about starting to-morrow.'

'To-morrow! Are you going so soon?'

'Yes; going to Sacramento, and thence on the "roll" I told Clint I meant to try, down New Mexico way.'

'And when to England?'

'That the Fates only can tell. I have no particular wish to get back. Have you?'

'Well—yes—I think I have. I don't take very kindly to any other country, for long at a time. In that sense, I'm a wanderer too. But we can't go back until we've got what we came for.'

They talked of the prospects of the country, and of the state generally, and exchanged some common-places about the prospect of their meeting again. Presently, Walter, who had heard the voices on awaking, came in. He was looking pale and tired. He wore a short canvas coat over his digger's shirt, and in one of the gaping dog's-eared pockets there was a small green leather case, considerably the worse for wear, which served the manifold purposes of purse, portfolio, and housewife. He shook hands with Deering, and seated himself in his favourite place on the locker, leaning his head against the wall. Daly told Walter that Deering was leaving the place on the following day, and Deering offered to take charge of any letters they might have ready, to be mailed at Sacramento.

This was a welcome offer to Walter, who had written to Florence at intervals during Daly's illness, and also to Miriam, and was very glad of an opportunity of securing a comparatively early despatch of his letters. They were ready; he had only to put that intended for Florence into a cover, enclose it in the letter for Miriam, and direct both to Mrs St Quentin, at the Firs, Drington, Hampshire. The letters were in the leather case in his pocket, and he got writing materials, which he placed on the locker, and then pulled out the case, produced the letters, and was about to write the addresses, when Deering interrupted him.

'What's the matter with your wrist, Clint?' he asked. 'It is bleeding, and you are smearing the edges of your letters with blood.'

'Bleeding!' exclaimed Walter, holding up his hand, and in doing so, pushing the letter-case, which he had mechanically closed, off the locker, whence it fell on the floor. 'So it is! I cut my wrist with a bit of stone this morning, and, washing my hands now, have set it bleeding again. It's a nasty deep three-cornered cut too.' He was twisting a handkerchief round it, when Deering said:

'Stay; I'll do it up for you!' and took out of his pocket a leather case containing a few small surgical instruments, and a provision of lint and sticking-plaster. With the aid of these materials he fastened up the cut in Walter's wrist, after a fashion, which he declared to be very comfortable, though it stiffened his hand, and caused him to write the names, 'Miriam' and 'Florence,' upon the several letters intended for his sister and his wife, in a formal and constrained manner. This done, and the letters confided to Deering, Walter cleared away the writing materials, and resumed his customary position.

The three young men talked on for a considerable time. There was no very strong or real liking between them, but they were of the same class in society, living among men who, for the most part, belonged to inferior classes; and the kind of association which theirs had been, if it had less bearing in the future than the associations of less exceptional phases of society, had greater importance in the present. When at length Deering announced that he must go, and was taking a cordial leave of Daly, combining good wishes with some final professional instructions, Walter declared his intention of accompanying him a bit of the way. He would see him past the bluff, he said; and they were leaving the hut together, when Deering saw his leather instrument-case lying on the floor, in front of the locker. He picked it up, put it in his pocket, and they went out.

At first they talked exclusively of Daly, but after awhile, observing Walter shade his eyes with his hand, though his broad-leaved Panama hat sheltered them already, Deering asked him if he felt ill.

'No,' said Walter; 'it's only the glare of the sun: it is hotter than usual to-day, I think; and I was up all night, and feel queer.'

'Indeed! Anything wrong with Daly?'

'No,' Walter answered, rather confusedly; 'I had something particular to do, which kept me up, and I was always bad at doing without sleep.'

'I should say so,' said Deering quietly, 'for you are inclined to stagger now; only, you are guarding against it at every step. Don't come any farther, I beg; and don't neglect yourself in any way, just now. You're overdone.'

He stood still as he spoke, and put out his hand. They had reached the bluff by this time, and, with some friendly words, they parted, Deering walking quickly on, and Walter watching his receding figure so long as it was in sight.

'He's a queer, restless fellow, and rather a bad lot, I suspect,' thought Walter. 'I wonder whether I shall ever see him again!'

'What the devil was he doing,' thought Deering, 'that kept him up all night, and made him look so confused? I don't think he rightly knew what he

was saying. Shouldn't be in the least surprised if he were in for the fever!'

#### CHAPTER XVIII.—BETWEEN DARK AND DAWN.

A day or two later, the friends held a consultation over their affairs. Daly was sufficiently recovered to make it safe to do so, and they had a good deal to discuss. Walter carefully avoided inspiring Lawrence with the degree of uneasiness which Spoiled Five's warning had communicated to himself. He told him that he had buried the nugget, for its greater security, and found Lawrence rather disposed to laugh at his caution. As was natural, their talk turned on England, on the possibilities of the future, and on those in whose life their success would make so much difference. There had been so much of the hard and practical in their life, that they had long left off day-dreaming, and it was now a relief to indulge in it for awhile again. It was pleasant now to talk of how Walter could go home, and claim his wife, and leave his father to make friends with him, or not, as he chose, which they thought he probably would not choose. Men of his sort of temper chafe more under the knowledge of the independence of others than from any other cause. Florence had told Walter in her letters that Mr Clint was civil to her, in her assumed character; but that was no reason why he should pardon its assumption. No; he must build no castles on that foundation; but it did not matter very much; he could not care a great deal now. He had come to think only of pecuniary independence of his father, as the one end to be desired and won. They were talking of the change in their looks since they had left England.

'I look rather cut up just now, don't I?' Lawrence asked.

'Indeed, you do. Your face is half as long again as it was, and as thin as a razor. But you will be all right in a few days.'

'It doesn't much matter,' said Lawrence, with a slight tone of regret in his voice. 'There is no one to fret over the spoiling of *my* beauty; and you will go home with yours improved, Walter. You see, that's the great difference between you and me; you have so much to go home to, and I have so little. Nothing, indeed: except for your sake, and your wife's—I never can forget how the brave little woman trusted me—I might just as well stay here, or anywhere, as go there.'

'I wish you had known my sister?' said Walter, after a pause.

'What put that into your head just now? Do you think we should have fallen desperately in love with one another, and made things comfortable by two stolen matches in the family instead of one?'

'Not exactly; and yet, I don't know. I think you would have liked Miriam. I wonder how she could ever bring herself to do what she has done. It was so unlike her!'

'There I think you are wrong,' said Daly; 'if I may say so, knowing your sister only from your description. I fancy she is ambitious and determined, and that she could not endure the sort of life which, you know, you, with a young man's comparative liberty, could not stand. She gave you much that sort of explanation, did she not? I think it is satisfactory.'

'I don't. Of course she could not stand the life; but to get out of it in that way was unworthy of her, I think. I can see in every line Florence has written to me about it, how *she* regards it.'

'No doubt; but you must not expect every woman—not even your sister—to be endowed with such delicacy of mind and simple good sense as your wife's. She is, in addition to all this, a romantic little party, and believes in love to an extent not warranted by human experience. Mrs St Quentin may like her husband well enough, though not so much as your wife would think necessary.'

'Perhaps so; but she doesn't write like it, and Florence does not write like it. Of course, it is only by experience that any woman can come to understand what she does in marrying for any motive but love; but instinct ought to have taught a girl like Miriam that it must be a losing game. She never mentioned his name in her last letters to me; they were full of her travels, and acquaintances, and of everything but her husband and her home.'

'Perhaps she is not of a domestic turn. There *are* such women, though Mrs Clint would not like to believe or admit the fact.'

'I can't tell whether she is or not. She never had any home she could love while she and I were together. But she has a fine nature, with all her self-will and worldliness, and generous and true beyond any woman I ever met.'

'True to you, you mean—true where she loves; otherwise, there's an offence against abstract truthfulness of character in her marriage, I think.'

'Yes, there is. I did mean true to me. Perhaps she is not a very frank person in general. I daresay she would not be altogether scrupulous about the way of doing anything which she or I wanted to have done. But I cannot blame her for *that*, having profited by it, as I have done. She has behaved splendidly to Florence. Poor girl, it has been a weary time for her, even with all Miriam's kindness and sympathy! What would it have been without them?'

'Thank Heaven, it is nearly over for her and for you too.'

'For her and for me!' said Walter, looking up in surprise at Daly. 'Why do you say *that* so distinctly; as if the time had not been long for you too, and for you was drawing to an end?'

Daly laughed. 'You are as sharp as a woman, Walter, and as suspicious. I may as well tell you I have been thinking of sending you home without me; only thinking of it, as yet. We were talking, just now, of the very different motives of your life and mine. I have not much there, and I have nothing here; but Deering has been talking to me, and has bitten me, I think, with his rolling-stone fancies. This New World is so large, and I have seen so little of it. There's something irresistible to me in the idea of the vast space, and the immense variety of the human species one may see.'

Walter was much distressed to find such a purpose had presented itself to Daly's mind, and endeavoured to persuade him to relinquish it by every means in his power. Daly told him again that he had not made up his mind, but had merely been set thinking by Deering.

'A bad lot, he is,' said Walter, 'though he did pull you through the fever. A cunning, dangerous fellow, I'm sure, who never did any one any good.'

'He does not seem to have done himself much,' said Lawrence. 'He does not let out much about himself; but he has been roaming about since he was eighteen; *he did* tell me that much; and seems no nearer settling down than at first. I daresay he has led a queer life, if one could only know about it.'

'Which one can't. And yet, what a way of worming things out of other people he has! I didn't like him a bit, and yet he knows as much about me as I should tell to the person I liked best—he knows all about me, in fact—except the fact that I'm married—and I daresay he has a pretty general notion of your past and present also.'

'Yes; I have nothing to hide—certainly not a sweet, pretty, little wife, as you have—and, as he seemed interested about our friendship and partnership, I told him our story—the "short and simple annals of the poor"—and how that old ruffian in India had treated me. He said rather a good thing, by-the-bye, characteristic of him, I fancy: "Why the devil didn't you go out to India, and make it deuced unpleasant for the old screw? You'd have brought him to reason that way, and done it much cheaper than coming out here." It wasn't worth while to explain to him that I did not look at it in that light. He would have made himself unpleasant in some way to old Clibborn, no doubt.'

'I am sure he would,' assented Walter. 'I wonder Deering hasn't got on better; he's the sort of man that ought to get on, if there's any good in pushing and self-assertion.'

'I fancy the vagabond strain in him neutralises those undeniably useful qualities.'

Then they talked of the probable value of their nugget; of when the next opportunity of conveying gold to the station under safe escort would be likely to occur; and of when they might hope to receive letters from England. It was now a long time since any communication from home had reached them, and Walter was getting very impatient. He did not even know where Florence was. When he had last heard from her, she was at Naples, where Mr and Mrs St Quentin meant to remain for the winter and the early spring, and from thence she expected they would return to England. Her letter was written only a short time before that of Mrs Ritchie had come to create an entire change in her life, actual and prospective. They referred to its contents, and to Florence's mentioning that Miriam was sitting for her portrait to a famous painter at Naples.

'She is very handsome, is she not?' asked Daly.

'Yes; I think so. Her features are not very regular, and she has not much colour, people say; but I think her face lovely—the expression is so bright and fearless; and her eyes are splendid! Large golden eyes. Can you imagine an eagle's eyes, with all the brightness left in them, and a great deal of exquisite softness added, on occasion?'

'It is not an easy effort of imagination, but I think I can. That is just the kind of beauty I have imagined sometimes, but I never really saw it. But, Walter, a woman like your sister must have married a rich man; she never could have been happy in an obscure position.'

'No,' said Walter, carelessly; 'I suppose not. At all events, she has done it, and there's no good in grumbling.'

'How delighted she will be to welcome you to her home! Where is St Quentin's place?'

'I don't know that he has one. Neither Miriam nor Florence has said anything about it; and as to her welcoming me, that must depend in a great measure on my venerable brother-in-law. I have rather a curiosity to see the old fellow. I daresay he is not a bad sort; if he were not Miriam's husband.'

'There you go again! One would think you were her mother, Walter, you are so hard to please. You have just said, very sensibly, that, as the deed was done, there was no use in grumbling, and there you are, grumbling again.'

'I beg your pardon, old fellow,' said Walter, with his usual gay good-humour, 'for bothering you with my guesses and forebodings about the fate of a woman whom you never saw, and perhaps never will see, though I hope you will. I have been boring you horribly all this time.'

'Indeed, you have not, Walter. Everything that interests you interests me also, and I have the utmost curiosity to see Mrs St Quentin; moreover, I am not at all inclined to doubt that it is much better for my peace of mind that I shall see her first, if I see her at all, as Mrs St Quentin. How very white and tired you are looking!'

'I am tired. I think I will turn in for a good night's rest, and so get rid of my headache.'

Nothing was said between the two of the care, as tender, and the watching-as vigilant, as any which a woman might have bestowed, which Walter had lavished on Daly; but between these two men words were not needed. Their hearts were knit together in one of those friendships which have the gravity, dignity, and simplicity of the higher class of male character, united with the partial affection which women feel for one another. It had grown out of a casual association into one of the most enduring ties which human feeling can create, and it was wholly uninjured by the great superiority of Lawrence to Walter.

Just before they parted for the night, Daly said: 'I don't exactly understand where it is you have hidden our nugget, Walter. You must shew me the spot to-morrow.'

'I made an exact memorandum of it in my pocket-book, like the man in Edgar Poe's story; only it's not in cipher. And I don't mean that any one else shall read it. Nothing like being business-like, you know. But as to shewing it to you to-morrow, it is out of the question. It's a good way up the ravine, and a steepish climb to get within sight of it. Don't flatter yourself you could do the distance, or anything like it even on the level, as yet. Deering cautioned me about your tendency to imagine yourself too well, and tire yourself.'

The solemn beauty of the night was at its deepest and grandest, and the isolated hut itself was hardly more tranquil than the clustered dwellings lower down in the valley. A great hush had fallen on all the striving and labour of the place; and the murmur of the streamlets, inaudible by day, save at the falls, might be heard, under the awful height of the sky. The great rifts in the rocks, the ditches, the dams, all the appliances of the search in which the population of the great valley worked their bodies and strained their minds to the utmost, looked like deserted ruins, gaunt and ugly, and desolate in the midst of nature's vastness and majesty.

If the solitary hut had had less rude and prosaic

surroundings, it might have been accounted picturesque; but as it was, it was only solitary and grim. Walter Clint was not destined to the good night's rest which was to cure his headache. There was a strange restlessness upon him, against which his resolution to sleep was powerless, and which set all his efforts to control his mind, and force it into pleasant tracks of thought, at defiance. Why could he not think of home, and Florence, of the success which had come to him and Daly, and the possibilities which that success opened up for his future? Why did all these subjects of reflection seem unreal, wavering, dreamlike, and all sorts of trivialities—quaint sayings of Spoiled Five, scraps of miners' gossip, the colour of Deering's neck-tie, little bits out of books he had read long ago, rhymes which he and Miriam had made when they were children, the face and voice of a lecturer whom he had heard at one of the medical schools in London, innumerable trifling occurrences of yesterday, of last year, of ten years ago—why did these things come into his aching head in crowds, rushing and tumbling over each other? If they would even have come one by one, so that he might think of each separately, only for the instant of time which it would require, and get rid of it! But there was no such relief. All these crowding ideas were worthless, silly, teasing; but he could no more separate, disperse, rid himself of them, than he could govern the movements of the insects which filled the dazzling air in the golden evenings. They wearied him inexpressibly, but he was powerless under their swarming attacks. The hiding of the nugget. He would think of that! He was determined to think of that. That was a fact; he had done it; he could not exactly, or indeed at all, remember why, but he had done it, and of course he could think of it, could recall every little incident of his task. No; he could not. When he tried to retrace in his fancy the path by which he had ascended the ravine, he found himself a young boy again, running along by the hedge which bordered the road leading from the Firs to Mr Martin's house at Drington. Here was Mr Martin, feeling his pulse, desiring him to put out his tongue, promising him jam with his physic. Very odd. A little while ago, he was a long way off, with a man whose name he ought to know, but could not remember, in a distant country, where were great mountains, and a pitiless desert, broad rivers, and herds of strange beasts, rough men, and a train of wagons. He had been riding among them only a minute ago, before he was working at the sluice out there. Out where? How could there be a sluice, and miners' tools, a locker, and a man with red hair and a red beard, in the little garden before the cottage in George Lane, where Mrs Reeve was lying dead? He must get up, and see about this; he could not permit it. The captain of the ship would not allow of such encumbrance; how came those things on the deck? He must turn out—it was his watch!

How was this! He was on land, not in a ship, but striving to burst open a locked and barred door, but whether he was wildly anxious to get in or out of the place which the door defended, he was not sure, he only knew that there was urgent need of him at the other side of those locks and bars; he struggled with all his strength, and, it seemed to him, with the strength of many others beside himself, to wrench them open, for there were whispering voices

calling to him, and stealthy steps creeping up to him, and now he must flee. And the locks and bars! Stay; he had the secret of them: they were old acquaintances of his; he had slid through them many a time when he was a boy. Why, he was a boy now, and he must get out of the house noiselessly, to escape from his father. The bolt is slipped, the key is turned, and Walter stands on the stony plateau, the huge rock frowning blackly before him, and the awful steel vault of the sky, a million miles, it seems to him, above him. To be sure, it is up there he wants to go: he knows all about it now; that was what was whispered of close to him; and he rushes out with a shout, and flings his arms up, as though they were wings, and he were trying them, but is tripped up, and brought down, prone upon his hands and face, by something which lies in the deep shadow. He utters no sound, but clutches at this substance, and lies, partly beside, partly over it, shuddering, until, in another minute, Lawrence is on the spot, and investigating that heap, by the light of the steel vault and the stars. Besides Walter, it consists of a dead dog and a dead man: of Sambo, dexterously choked by a loop at the end of a long line; and of Spoiled Five, whose skull is shattered, probably by the butt-end of a Derringer.

#### SPRING SONG.

Blow, Spring, upon the lap of earth,  
And draw the winter from the hills;  
Oh, draw men from a thousand ills,  
And touch their sadness into mirth.

Blow through the woods, and wake again  
New leafage on the naked trees,  
That creak and chatter to the breeze  
Which hurries from the northern main.

Blow cross the wolds, and down the straths  
Where old melodious rivers flow,  
And shadows play, and lilies grow,  
And mosses creep about the paths.

Blow round about the garden bower,  
Where clinging rose and jasmine stray,  
And where the liquid forces play  
That roll the bud and spread the flower.

Blow o'er the hills and lakes and plains,  
And stir them with thy quickening life,  
Till Nature feels the generous strife  
Of being working in her veins.

Blow through the haunts of sin and death,  
Where festering vices thickly breed;  
Blow unto men a better creed,  
And sift them with thy winnowing breath.

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